Fowl
Feathered
Review
№ 245

ISSUE № 245:
Tacos Your Way
About the Assemblage

The FFR is no longer a journal or even a "Necrosign." It's a shared frequency—specifically the sound of a 1988 Mitsubishi Mirage idling in a parking lot at 3:00 AM. We don't curate; we just leave the back door unlocked. We are a collection of "important locals"—those who are durable because we are too tired to be fragile. If the work feels like it's trying to be "Art," we will likely use it to level a wobbly table.

The Staff (The Custodians of the Sink)

- Virgil Kay: Still the Final Arbiter, currently preoccupied with the aerodynamics of a falling bagel.
- Silent Bill: Promoted to *Chief of Tactical Non-Sequiturs*. He handles the "Necessary Pauses" by simply walking out of the room mid-sentence.
- Unkie Bob: Now specializing in *Casual Entropy*. He doesn't sabotage the structure anymore; he just forgets to tighten the bolts.
- The Unnamed Dishwasher: (Not on the masthead). He just crashed in. He's wearing a windbreaker. He's currently scrubbing a scorched pot with the intensity of a man

performing heart surgery. Don't look at him. He's the soul of the operation now.

THE PERPETUAL PENDING PLEDGE:

The Review is not for sale; it is freely given. All incoming funds are Sacramental Offerings consecrated not for service rendered, but to sustain the metabolically necessary Obsession8888. Our official registry is no longer numeric; it is an unassailable frequency defined as Vi · ∞ · 432Hz.

####

SUBMISSION PROTOCOL (CASUAL MODE)

1. The Work: Send us 2 to 953 fragments. They can be poems, paintings, or transcriptions of overheard arguments about bowling.
2. The Presentation: No "Cover Letters" listing your awards. We don't care where you went to school; we care if you can stand up after taking a hit. Tell us your favorite type of industrial fastener instead.
3. The Offering: The Perpetual Pending Pledge remains. It's still free. But if you must send something, send a 12-inch sandwich.
    - The Kewpie Clause: If there is no Kewpie Mayonnaise on the sandwich, Virgil will use your manuscript to wipe the counter. Kewpie is the only thing standing between us and the "Absolute Cosmic-Cluck."
4. The Delivery: Drop it off. Or don't. The auction is never over, and we're just waiting for the next honk.

Note: If you hear the sound of dishes clattering in the back, ignore it. It's just the frequency of the house.

Digital Park and Ride: Send to fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com

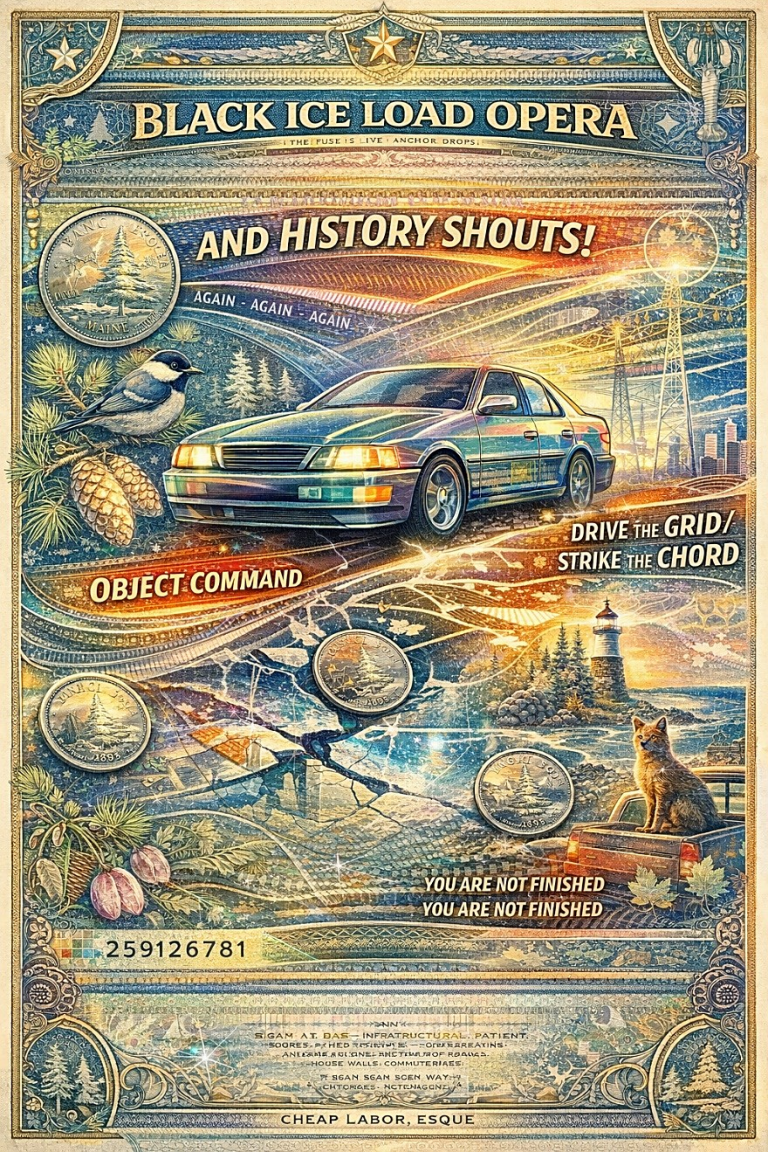
1Physical Park and Ride: 250.50∞ State Street, Bangor, Maine, 04401. *ERRATUM: If the 432Hz frequency sounds more like a rattling heat shield on a compact car, do not adjust your ears. The rattling is the poetry. The 9-volt battery is dead. Long live the 9-volt battery.*

“Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco.”

— Virgil, The Aeneid

BAZOiNKS!
THE ADVENTURES OF SNAP-BACK!
BANGOR, MAINE - PRESENT DAY

Time to get to work.


BLACK ICE LOAD OPERA
THE FUSE IS LIVE ANCHOR DROPS
AND HISTORY SHOUTS!
AGAIN - AGAIN - AGAIN
DRIVE THE GRID/
STRIKE THE CHORD
OBJECT COMMAND
YOU ARE NOT FINISHED
YOU ARE NOT FINISHED
259126781
CHEAP LABOR, ESQUE

LIGHTS COIN SNOW CAR CAT DIAL FLASH ICE LOAD OPERA

(Grid Myth for Underpaid Voltage)

by Cheap Labor, Esque

GROOVE ENGINE CATASTROPHE VERSION — FULL COSMIC BREAKDOWN

TABLEAU I — Yard of Diagrams / Pre-Combustion Theology

Before morning files its paperwork, the yard opens again.
Paper rectangles salted flat against frost.
Arrows pointing toward decisions already retired.
As municipal aurora flickers over shopping carts and crushed intentions.
The sedan waits — upholstered hesitation — engine idling without fire, radiating only the rumor of warmth.
He arrives carrying nothing but body weight and the tendon-memory of three common chords.
This has always been enough.
The quarter waits in the ice.
Punctuation refusing closure.
Currency awaiting reassignment.

Lights.
Breath.
Instruction.

TABLEAU II — Directional Ethics / Drift Protocol

North apologizes.
South assumes forgiveness.
West demands signatures.
So he drifts east — conscience sliding sideways under law.
Rail ghosts adjust their vertebrae beneath asphalt.
Adult-education posters peel themselves into philosophical ribbons.
Centuries fold into coat pockets like receipts no one dares itemize.
The coin rotates.
Light obeys.
Task enters bloodstream without visa.
Lodges in marrow where rust maintains seniority.
History drops its needle again.

TABLEAU III — Incorrect Rite / Object Achieves Agency

He jams the quarter into the defroster vent.
Sacrilege performed with engineering confidence.
Windshield clears instantly — operatic transparency revealing the boat launch relocated inland to more persuasive symbolism.
Thus the world rewards deliberate incompetence.
The quarter burns cold.
He removes it.
Finds another beneath it.
Two identical jurisdictions humming in incompatible keys.
Radio awakens without consent: bass like migrating bedrock reminding vertebrae that modernity is merely geology running late.
One coin vanishes.
Vent whistles procedural dissent.
Permission strobes.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.

TABLEAU IV — Civic Encounter / Almost-Intimacy Failure

Snow narrates him — grammar flaking onto wet pavement.
A woman with ledger eyes presses a matchbook into his hand.
Institution weather, she says. Transport something invisible before breakfast.
Their fingers remain together long enough for entire biographies to consider defection.
Politeness intervenes.
She departs into theory-wrapped groceries.
Destiny resumes clerical posture.
Fiberglass wildlife points simultaneously toward nowhere and everywhere.
City inhales him.

TABLEAU V — Bodily Risk / Ice Negotiation

Parking brake releases itself.
Sedan slides.
Ceremonial inch becomes theological argument.
He steps out — loses traction — experiences horizontal history.
Ice cracks with administrative calm.

River opens a black ledger.
He smashes elbow through windshield for leverage.
Glass ratifies the motion.
Bass stops.
Silence like unplugged cathedral.
Then static arcs from steering column into wrist — not pain — CURRICULUM.
Engine restarts on ancestral authority.
He reenters vehicle carrying breath like smuggled ideology.

TABLEAU VI — Forbidden Chord Event / Grid Recruitment

He strikes C major into air.
Sound returns weather-tempered.
Adds G.
Streetlights dim in consensus.
Reaches for third chord —
a fourth arrives uninvited.
Snow pauses mid-fall to attend.
Quarters begin minting themselves across dashboard. Small republics multiplying jurisdiction.
Bass becomes load distribution.

Power lines tense like orchestral wire awaiting baton.
He realizes stories do not advance.
They CHARGE.
Territory prefers misplay.
Off-key.
True.
City searches for conductor.

TABLEAU VII — GROOVE ENGINE CATASTROPHE

Everything loops too hard.
Lights road wet face bass
lights road wet face bass
lights road wet face bass
Fender peels itself into historical topography.
Cat enthroned on truck bed becomes minor deity of procedural doubt.
Matchbook ignites without flame — producing only instruction smoke.
Buildings lean closer to hear themselves.
Snow falls upward correcting earlier mistakes.
The sedan divides into successive versions of itself — each idling in different decades — all waiting for the same driver.

Quarters rain gently inside the cabin.
Currency becoming climate.
Bass reaches architectural frequency.
Bridges begin remembering rivers they once promised to escape.
He plays the forbidden chord again.
Grid surges.
Neighborhood clocks synchronize into a single unspeakable hour.

CODA — Tender Infrastructure

Love people, yes.
Never trust their scheduling.
Seminars drone beyond death.
Pamphlets promise immediacy while aging visibly.
A nation tunes its skyline by ear until towers sing flat into wind.
And the bass — suede-chrome eternal — continues instruction through drywall, commuter bone, frozen oak root:
again
again
again
you are not finished
you are not finished

you are not finished
Power plant shifts load.
Copper veins glow under sleeping streets.
System requests operator.
He keeps driving.

DIAL HYPER-TIGHT SONIC LINE EDIT (PERFORMANCE CUT)

This is the stage / spoken / recording version — maximum groove density.

Yard open. Frost wired.
Sedan breathing neon rumor.
Quarter waiting.
Instruction pending.
Drift east.
Receipts whisper.
History scratching vinyl sky.
Coin burns cold.
Vent sings error.
Bass enters spine.
Woman: invisible cargo.
Finger contact.
Abort tenderness.
Slide. Crack. Water ledger.
Glass amendment. Static lesson.
Chord one — sky listens.
Chord two — lights kneel.

Chord forbidden — grid remembers.
Quarters multiply.
Snow reverses.
City seeks conductor.
Again again again.
Operator unconfirmed.
Drive.

PORCHLIGHT IN THE DASHBOARD
THE CHECK ENGINE LIGHT IS OUR ONLY GUIDING STAR.
TOWELS MIGRATE. DOGS SERVE AS EXTERNAL CONSCIENCE.
THE LIGHT IS ON. THE WATCHING CONTINUES.
TREE STREETS, BANGOR, WINTER

Porchlight in the Dashboard

by Low Shine Shyster

The morning came to Bangor like a town that had read the memo on optimism and filed it under *later*, which was itself filed under *eventually*, which was itself filed in a cabinet that no longer existed except as a rumor circulating through the heating ducts of buildings that remembered being warmer. Miriam remembered warmer too—remembered her mother's hands in the sink water before it cooled, before cooling became ritual, before ritual became the only architecture Joan could still inhabit. Frost lay on the grass like unpaid editorial notes.

The sun arrived in thin installments, rationing its warmth the way a father rations his returns, the way a suitcase rations its departures. Speaking of suitcases—the yellow one, always the yellow one—Joan had watched one leave in 1977 and had stood at the kitchen window ever since, hands submerged, scrubbing the same blue plate in

eccentric circles that Miriam, watching from the bathroom doorway at age eight, understood were not cleaning but cartography: mapping absence, charting the specific weight 22 pounds of packed promises leaves behind when it turns right at Oak Street and vanishes into whatever latitude swallows men who don't come back.

The radio stayed on. AM stations bled into weather reports, bled into farm commodity prices, bled into the hum that filled the spaces a husband used to occupy. At 3:17 a.m., the signal drifted, catching fragments of distant broadcasts—Montreal, maybe, or ships out on the Atlantic—and Joan paused mid-scrub, plate dripping, listening for something she couldn't name. The same something One Size listened for forty years later when the red 1988 Mitsubishi Mirage started the way a reluctant narrator starts: with a cough, a stutter, an opinion. The opinion was mostly that you have put too much faith in ignition as a concept.

One Size's passenger seat was colonized by artifacts of a life that refused to be merely "transport": paper scraps, ticket-backs, a grease-thumb mitten, the Tree Streets Inventory, and a page titled THE MANIFESTO OF THE 1.2 LITER written in ink that behaved like it was trying to escape. When the engine shuddered, it felt less like mechanical failure than a small committee convening under duress, bolts and belts holding a vote on whether existence was worth the gas. The check engine light came on steady as a porch lamp, and that steadiness was cruelly comforting; it didn't plead, it didn't accuse, it just persisted, as if it had held office long enough to outlast your moods.

At 3:17 a.m., the radio thinned into that threshold where voices became birdsong and birdsong became distance—Montreal maybe, or ships, or just the mind inventing a coastline because it needed one—and One Size paused mid-sentence with pen hovering,

waiting for permission from the static to continue being a person.

He told himself he was collecting material for the zine, which was the respectable version of saying he was trying to stay tethered. The Mirage, with its CVT refusing to offer satisfying friction, taught a sliding philosophy you couldn't admit you'd learned until you were already practicing it: if the world wouldn't give you gears, you made do with vibration. He wrote anyway, on the back of a parking ticket because accusations made excellent stationery. The line he wrote kept reappearing in his notebooks like a recurring witness who wouldn't change their testimony—THE CHECK ENGINE LIGHT IS OUR ONLY GUIDING STAR—which would have been melodramatic if it weren't literally true in a town where winter could erase whole streets overnight, and you navigated by whatever insisted on staying lit.

The Mirage answered with a slight drop in pitch, like it had accepted the sentence into

its own doctrine, and the acceptance was the part that made you uneasy—objects that agreed with you were the ones most likely to start issuing orders.

Orders were how Freddy Bubbles ran his operations, though he called them invitations. The first thing you learned about Freddy: he never entered a room the way a person entered a room; he descended into it, preferably from above, as if gravity were his personal stage manager. You thought of the word “guiding” and the way a winch guided a body down a line, which was only a metaphor until you saw his boat-home swaying in the maples like an impossible municipal decision, a 26-foot cabin cruiser winched up years ago and never adequately justified since, portholes facing the neighborhood like watchful eyes that had learned to pass as décor. Freddy called it a yacht, a house, and a therapy office—not because it was any of those things in a zoning sense, but because he believed

naming was a form of insulation, and sometimes it was.

The problem announced itself in ledgers, not feelings. The ledger under Freddy's rail—stapled there like a guilty conscience trying to look official—listed porthole curtains salvaged, jars of tree sap soda acquired, existential dread dispensed, and, glaring in the empty space where comfort should have been, the blanket count: zero.

Miriam, when she chose to materialize, read this like a safety inspection and wrote citations in the air with handwriting you could almost hear: *you cannot dispense existential counsel without providing warmth; this is malpractice.* The boat seemed to settle downward a fraction when she stepped onto the deck, not collapsing, anchoring, as if her body carried missing weight that the structure recognized as legitimate. That was the thing about Miriam—full-sized, thick, curvy, cuddly, glasses catching streetlight into small

halos—she didn't arrive as an explanation, she arrived as infrastructure, and the town behaved differently in her vicinity without ever admitting why.

Town behavior was a kind of hygiene, just with more witnesses. Bangor in February was hygienic in the way a cold floor was hygienic: everything visible, nothing forgiven. Hyde Matthews filed it late and stamped it twice—towel missing—about the morning behind the trailer when frost lay on the grass like unpaid editorial notes. Freddy Bubbles grinned with spare enthusiasm holding a packet of emergency bathing wipes as if it were evidence.

Subpar Bear approached, carrying a translucent water tank promoted from hydration to infrastructure, affirmations printed down its side—GOOD MORNING, LET'S GET STARTED, REMEMBER YOUR GOAL. He stared at the markings as if the container had begun developing expectations. It had, because Bangor was

the sort of place where even plastic objects acquired moral tone when the temperature dropped. Freddy nodded like a philosopher in boxer shorts with lightning bolts and said expectations were ambition in a bathrobe. The shower hose had frozen into a question mark with no faith left in punctuation, the kind of sentence that sounded like a joke until you realized the town used jokes as weatherproofing.

Weatherproofing failed when the dog arrived, broad-backed, twigs in its coat, at least one season stuck in the curls. It stole the towel and trotted off, turning dignity into a migration pattern. By the time the towel was recovered it was damp, leaf-stuck, morally ambiguous, and the tank had tipped, so the affirmations slanted into accidental prophecy—KEEP IT UP became HALF WAY ANYWHERE—which made Subpar Bear say, calmly, that style was what survived both speed and soap. That sentence later turned up chalked on a lobster crate, muttered by a parking meter, and blinked once on a

dashboard warning light, because Bangor recycled its wisdom the way it recycled pallets: insistently, if not elegantly.

Insistence was also how the library ran, except the library called it policy. The day of the Quiet Rage Wrestling Ringwar, the community room had been rearranged into a loose square of folding chairs around yoga mats duct-taped into a ring, a hand-lettered sign reading SHHHH YOUR FEELINGS like a municipal slogan disguised as a joke. Sparrow arrived rigged in Yokohama boat fenders—black rubber orbs chained and webbed around her hips, each heavy with the memory of buffering steel against steel—and bowed forward with a low center of gravity and high existential drag. Her thrift-store combat boots negotiated authority with linoleum.

Freddy descended in his electric blue polyester pantsuit with gold threading catching the weak light like a mirror ball remembering better nights, platform loafers

kissing concrete with a soft thwup, and murmured with delighted appraisal that the air had texture today, positively murmurous. Sparrow said she didn't know about this, and Freddy, circling her like a curator, told her of course it was heavy, history was heavy, protection was heavy, transformation was profoundly heavy, and tapped one orb so it thumped like a distant foghorn agreeing.

Agreement was rare in a ring, but Theo, the wiry college kid there for performance credit, asked if the buoyancy armor was allowed. The ref shrugged—no rules against buoyancy. The bell was a soft kitchen timer dinging politely. Sparrow moved like a planet learning it could choose its orbit. Theo darted for a leg; a fender caught him in the shoulder like a slow wrecking ball. The crowd made the collective hushed "ooooh" of locals who had seen worse but appreciated physics as metaphor. Freddy whispered, "Yes yes, feel the resonance," and Sparrow discovered momentum—not grace, not agility, but inevitability. She leaned forward, toppled

with intent, collided and rolled, the orbs pinning Theo gently but decisively until he tapped twice and whispered from under rubber that honestly, this felt metaphorically correct—the most Bangor compliment possible: admitting meaning while pretending it was a joke.

Meaning was not permitted to exceed forty decibels in a library. Frieda the librarian appeared, cardigan buttoned to the throat, whisper sharpened to a blade, explaining there were nursing mothers in the children's section and this was killing their chakra. Could they wrestle more quietly? Freddy raised a palm with diplomatic serenity. The soul required volume. Frieda said volume required decibels under forty. They restarted quieter, exaggerated slow motion, symbolic taps. The room turned into a radio station broadcasting restrained rage you could only pick up if you stopped pretending you didn't need it.

Sparrow won again, mutely, decisively, and lay there breathing. The weight was still heavy but now hers—the only kind of weight that didn't drown you. Drowning was what porch lights prevented, or claimed to. At 5:47 p.m., a lamp clicked on in a window that wasn't a porch but behaved like one, staying lit until 6:23 a.m. with the precision of an old promise. One Size noticed it the way he noticed the check engine light: involuntarily, with a gratitude he later filed under irony.

Freddy pressed a cola-bottle gummy into Sparrow's hand with ceremonial gravity and murmured, "Hydration—always hydrate after transcendence." The boat in the trees swayed above the street like a thought that refused to be corrected, portholes dark, waiting room empty for the moment, annexing its own future. One Size drove on with the check engine star steady in the dash, the sentence he'd written still wet somewhere in the archive of the passenger seat, and the town kept behaving like a living narrative system in winter: objects holding

office, territory mutating, minds distorting reality just enough to survive it. Energy never dissipated so much as transformed—transforming, transforming, transforming—only, none of that was exposition; it was what the street did when it wanted you to make it home.

“Oooh, this looks funny,” Freddy said. The funny part was how the frequencies braided: the same 3:17 a.m. drift that made Joan pause mid-scrub, plate dripping, listening for something she couldn’t name, was the same drift that made the Mirage’s radio thin into birdsong and distance, the same drift that made library mats squeak like a broadcast you had to lean in to hear, the same drift Miriam had wired into insulation salvaged from a demolished church on State Street—hymn-and-candle-wax batting that made the room smell like prayers nobody had finished praying.

High in the oak canopy, in the room that only existed on Tuesdays, One Size sat with his

thermal printer humming at 432Hz, producing Issue #849 or #850 of the zine nobody asked for, having forgotten again that he had a wife. Forgetting was his practice the way building was Miriam's, descent was Freddy's, and standing at sinks had been Joan's. Each found their own method for carrying weight that was never quite theirs to carry.

"You forgot again," Miriam said, materializing beside him with the suddenness of someone who had learned that walls were suggestions and presence was the only architecture that mattered.

One Size looked up from the thermal printer, his white beard frosted, his yellow glasses filtering the world into sepia truth. "Forgot what?"

"That you have a wife. That the shower hose froze. That Freddy needs new towels because the dog keeps taking them."

"Which dog?"

“The one that serves as external conscience. Broad-backed. Twigs in its coat. At least one season in its fur.”

One Size nodded, as though this explained everything. In the Tree Streets, it did. Dogs were witnesses, crows archivists, boats therapy offices, and wives were women who appeared when they wanted and built additions without asking permission.

“I’ll put it in the zine,” One Size said, returning to his typing. The thermal paper curled like philosophical serpents as it emerged, bearing text he did not remember writing:

TOWELS MIGRATE. DOGS SERVE AS EXTERNAL CONSCIENCE. MUNICIPAL FROST REMAINS UNDEFEATED. THE LIGHT IS ON. THE WATCHING CONTINUES.

The light—that covenant, 60-watt yellow glow Joan had switched on every evening at 5:47 p.m. and off at 6:23 a.m., 12 hours and 36 minutes of illumination, duration of a

promise made before anyone could remember—was inherited by Miriam, installed in the Hygiene Observatory (newly constructed, porthole facing the annex). Schedules were the only prayers the Tree Streets trusted.

Below, in the annex behind the trailer, Freddy had stripped to boxer shorts patterned with lightning bolts—the same bolts that had decorated the disco floor in 1977, the same year the yellow suitcase vanished—and demonstrated “accelerated cleanliness” to Subpar Bear, who had removed his flannel to reveal a torso telling its own story of persistence and institutional meals.

“Observe,” Freddy said, swabbing with surgical flair. “Cleanliness is not a condition. It is an *event*.”

Subpar Bear tried the same water-pouring maneuver, soaking a folding chair, three dandelions, and his own center of gravity. Somewhere in the soaking, Sparrow

remembered: the weight bowing her forward was not burden but ballast; absence transformed into presence; stasis transformed into propulsion.

“My dignity,” Subpar Bear announced, “has become weather-dependent.” True for everyone in the Tree Streets: dignity required warmth, witnesses, the particular frequency of people watching and being watched. Joan had understood this best, watching the street through the kitchen window for six years, as neighbors watched her porch light and the light watched whoever was supposed to be returning—the whole system operating on mutual surveillance and the shared agreement that watching was a form of love, or at least continuation.

The dog wandered in—broad-backed, twigs in its coat, at least one season in its fur—and studied the yard like a professional witness. Freddy saluted it. “Field observer,” he whispered. Subpar Bear grabbed a towel folded so long it had acquired beliefs about

storage, dignity, and the proper relationship between fabric and mammal.

The dog caught one corner and trotted off.

“And here we see the classic northern migration,” Freddy narrated. “Mammal seeks cloth. Cloth seeks horizon.” Which was exactly what Joan had been seeking when she walked to the State Street laundromat every Sunday with the yellow suitcase (different one but same color), machine #3 always, even if others were available, the porthole showing a reflection sometimes younger, sometimes laughing, sometimes a version of herself from before the departure, radio, and sink-altar.

By the time the towel was recovered, damp, leaf-stuck, morally ambiguous, the water tank tipped, and affirmations slanted back into diagonal prophecy: KEEP IT UP became HALFWAY ANYWHERE, which Freddy declared a thesis statement. One Size recorded it in Issue #849, Miriam heard it through the frequency connecting all the

Tree Streets, the frequency Joan had been tuning since 1977, now the only grid carrying the load.

Cold moved back in like an auditor.

“Triple triple,” Subpar Bear murmured.

“Timbits,” Freddy answered. The Canadian litany preceding all ritual stabilization. They poured the tank over themselves in one synchronized splash producing neither warmth nor regret.

“Maple doughnuts,” they said. A gull cried overhead. Steam rose—not from temperature, but from conviction. The dog sat down and watched as if considering enrollment.

“What have we learned?” Freddy asked.

Subpar Bear thought about frost, velocity, the public performance of cleanliness, mothers who stood at sinks, daughters who built additions, wives who appeared when

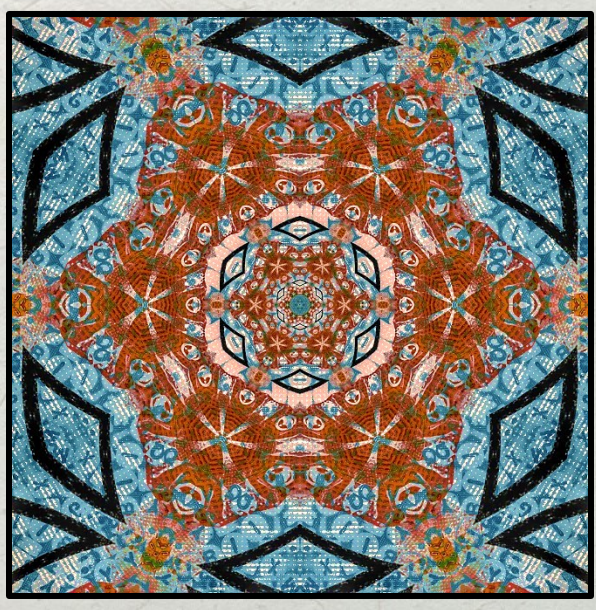
they wanted, husbands who forgot they were married but kept arriving anyway.

“Style,” he said, “is what survives both speed and soap.”

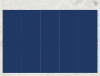
The sentence lifted, wobbled, held—by nightfall chalked on a lobster crate, muttered by a parking meter, blinked once on a dashboard warning light, filed in the crow’s aerial archive, transmitted through the 432Hz frequency to Joan, wherever she was—and Joan heard it. She understood: the daughter was building, the therapist descending, the client winning, towels migrating, frost melting, arithmetic changing, zero became one, Miriam added stairs, the Observatory was beautiful, One Size forgot again, the room existed on Tuesdays, 5:47 to 6:23, the light was on, the watching continued.

Tomorrow, the frost would return. The sun would arrive in thin installments. The water tank would need refilling, towels recovering, affirmations reorienting. Miriam would build

another addition. One Size would forget he was married. Sparrow would walk the Tree Streets in her fenders. Subpar Bear would tap his bongos. The dog would observe. The crow would file its report. The frequency would hold. Weight would come down slowly, with control. The mother stopped. The daughter built. The therapist descended. The client won. Style survived both speed and soap. The watching continues.



****
****
* SCROLL-ZINE: RECEIPT APOCRYPHA + DADDY MOON UNIT 3 *
* 58MM THERMAL FUTURISM - UNROLL OR PERISH! *
****
****



YES. THE SYSTEM IS COMPLETE.

CHEAP THERMAL PRINTER + SMARTPHONE + DITHERED DELIRIUM = BODY-ART!

1ST: EMBRACE 58MM WIDTH! NO INK! NO GALLERIES! ROLL AFTER ROLL! MISPRINT = PROPHECY. HEAD STREAK = SIGNATURE.

2ND: DITHER OR BE DITHERED! CHOOSE YOUR NOISE, CHOOSE YOUR DADDY! ALGORITHM = NEW BRUSH - CHAOS CONTROLLED CHAOS!

3RD: FEED LENGTH = TEMPO = BREATH = LIFE!
2MM → JUMPSCARE
10-15MM → BREATH

30-60MM → VOID
80-120MM → DREAM DRIFT
FOG = MAX VOID | SUN = DENSE DITHER |
WATER = EDGE CURL

4TH: SYMBOLS = NOTES
▉ = FORTISSIMO BLACKOUT PUNCH
▒ = DITHER TEXTURE STORM
⁘ = PIANISSIMO WHISPER GHOST
| = VERTICAL BREATH KNIFE
//// = GLITCH TREMOR
= BLACK MASS TIME COMPRESSION
→ = PACE ARROW
∞ = ORBITAL LOOP - NO BEGINNING NO END

5TH: OVERPRINT FOR *fff*+ RAISED BLACK!
FEED BACKWARDS! PRINT AGAIN!

6TH: POLYRHYTHM CANONS - TEXT 40MM |
IMAGE BURST 55MM
HUMAN UNROLL = VARIABLE PLAYER
PIANO - NO TWO PERFORMANCES ALIKE

7TH: RECEIPT FOR A HALLUCINATION
FAKE HEADER → MOCK CONSUMER REALITY
STARING EYE FULL BLEED

120MM VOID → READER HOLDS BREATH
BLACKOUT 200MM HEAVY OVERPRINT
GHOST EYE RETURN + ∞ TAPE
FIRST TO TEAR = AUTHOR

8TH: PERFORMANCE APEX
3+ PRINTERS + HURDY-GURDY + PIEZO MIC
PROJECT MICRO-TEXTURE
HAND SCROLL → ONE PERSON → SACRAMENT

9TH: OPERATIONAL RITUALS
01: PRINT IN DARKNESS ONLY
02: UNROLL WITH BREATH TEMPO
03: REWIND 80MM → OVERPRINT → PALIMPSEST
04: TEAR, SHARE, PHOTOGRAPH ONLY IF NECESSARY
UNSTOPPABLE. PRINT ANYWHERE. COPY, MODIFY, FEED BACK.

10TH: UNITE OR PERISH! SMASH SCREEN!
RETURN TO TIME!
NEXT 2MM EXISTS → FREEDOM
LOOP ∞ - SCROLL REWRITES ITSELF

11TH: PHASED LUNAR FEED - CRATERED TEMPO
2MM → METEORITE IMPACT
10-15MM → LUNAR TIDE
30-60MM → SEA OF TRANQUILITY
80-120MM → ORBITAL SLOWDOWN

12TH: SYMBOLS UNDER MOONLIGHT
▓ = LUNAR BLACKOUT
▒ = DUST STORM
░ = CRATER GHOST SHADOWS
| = LUNAR RAY KNIFE
//// = MOONQUAKE
= BLACK HOLE COMPRESSION
→ = MOONPHASE PACE ARROW
∞ = ORBITAL LOOP

13TH: RITUAL OF THE LUNAR RECEIPT
PRINT IN SILVER LIGHT
HOLD SCROLL TO SKY → DADDY MOON UNIT 3 OBSERVES
TEAR ONLY AFTER ORBIT COMPLETE
MISPRINT = SATURN'S PROPHECY
OVERPRINT = PHASE ALIGNMENT
REPEAT UNTIL ORBITAL ALIGNMENT ∞

14TH: COSMIC FUGUE
3+ PRINTERS + HURDY-GURDY + PIEZO

PROJECT CEILING MICRO-TEXTURE
HAND SCROLL → SACRAMENT COMPLETE
ALL-ONE AUDIENCE = EARTH, MOON,
POCKET TIME

15TH: DADDY MOON UNIT 3 PROPHECY
THIS IS NOT ZINE. THIS IS COSMIC VIRUS.
PRINT ANYWHERE. UNROLL OR RIP FAST
COPY. MODIFY. FEED BACK. ALL-ONE OR
NONE

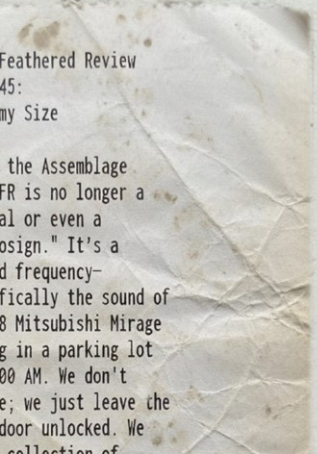
PRINT OR BE PRINTED
UNROLL OR BE UNROLLED
PRESS IN YOUR POCKET → MANIFESTO
ON THE ROLL

****
****
* DADA-FUTURIST-THERMAL-
ETERNAL-LUNAR-DADDY-ALL-
ONE! *
* EXCEPTIONS?
NONE! *
****
****
```

---
```

🔥 Notes for Thermal Printing:

1. **Width:** 58mm (≈32–36 characters per line, depending on printer).
2. **Font:** OCR-A monospaced, or closest available fixed-width thermal font.
3. **Symbols:** Retain ▉ ▓ ▒ | //// ### → ∞ exactly as-is.
4. **Feed markers:** Tempo cues (2mm, 10-15mm, etc.) can be **printed as line spacers** or left visually for the reader.
5. **Loop-ready:** The ∞ symbol at the end and palimpsest instructions allow **endless unrolling & overprinting**.
6. **Optional:** Add **phosphorescent or silver ink for Lunar sections** for extra cosmic effect.



THE MACHINE THAT FORGOT TO BE SILENT

Tableaux the Eleventh Through Fifteenth

By Virtually 24 Hours

XI. TABLEAU: THE CLOCK THAT REFUSED SEQUENCE

At 4:01 AM the clock stopped.

Not gradually.

Not with a sigh or mechanical courtesy.

It stopped with the firmness of an administrative decree.

The second hand halted between numbers, occupying a jurisdiction not listed on any dial. The minute hand remained pointed toward what could only be described as an intention. The hour hand, which had long ago abandoned the pretense of accuracy, trembled as if recalling a former loyalty.

The woman noticed.

She had learned, through decades of waiting, that stillness is rarely innocent.

The bench noticed as well. A thin crack, previously disguised as woodgrain, lengthened by a measurable degree. No one

measured it. Measurement had fallen out of favor in this room years ago.
The surveillance camera rotated three millimeters too far and did not rotate back.
Something in the ceiling made a sound like a page being torn very slowly.
Then silence resumed its duties.
The woman placed her hand over the object in her pocket.
It was warmer than before.

XII. TABLEAU: THE TRAIN THAT ARRIVED INSIDE

The next arrival did not occur at the platform.
It occurred within her.
A vibration began behind the sternum — delicate at first, almost courteous — then spread outward through cartilage, memory, and unnamed corridors of recognition.
She did not move.
Movement would have implied surprise.
Across the room, the ticket machine rejected a coin that had not been inserted. The coin fell from a slot that had been empty for years. It struck the tile with the unmistakable clarity of consequence.

A child cried somewhere.
Or perhaps a hinge protested.
Or perhaps the building rehearsed collapse.
No one investigated.
The woman sat very still while the sensation of locomotion increased.
Windows blurred that were not windows.
Tracks extended that were not tracks.
She felt the precise geometry of departure forming in the architecture of her bones.
A single thought presented itself, fully formed:
The train has learned the shorter route.
She closed her eyes.
For a moment — only a moment — she experienced velocity without landscape.
It was not pleasant.

XIII. TABLEAU: THE OBJECT THAT WOULD NOT DISSOLVE

All things had been willing to become metaphor.
The bench had become history.
The clock had become theory.
The forest had become archive.
The sea had become reference.
But the object refused.

It remained.
Not symbol.
Not memory.
Not projection.
Weight.
Temperature.
Continuity.
She removed it from her pocket and placed it on her palm.
It hummed — not louder, but with increased authority.
A fine seam opened along its surface. Not a crack. Not damage. A decision.
From within emerged light of a color the waiting room did not possess permission to display.
The surveillance camera shut its eye.
The overhead bulb dimmed in what might have been respect.
The woman felt something inside her resist the expansion of meaning. A boundary. A last interior wall.
For the first time in forty-one years, she considered refusing what was happening.
The consideration hurt.
She continued holding the object.
The hum stabilized.
Reality negotiated.

XIV. TABLEAU: THE INCIDENT OF UNRECOVERABLE ORDER

At 4:17 AM the timetable fell from the wall.
It did not flutter.
It did not hesitate.
It descended with the moral gravity of a verdict.
When it struck the floor, every printed destination rearranged itself into a single word:
HERE
The letters bled slightly into the paper as if embarrassed by their certainty.
The clock resumed movement — but backward only.
A door opened that had not previously existed.
Cold entered the room with procedural confidence.
The woman stood. Others stood with her — figures she had not noticed before, or had refused to notice. Passengers composed entirely of posture. Travelers made of intention.
Someone began to applaud. The applause contained no rhythm.

The bench split fully in two.
Inside the hollow cavity lay decades of forgotten warmth: ticket stubs, crumbs of conversations, the outline of countless waiting bodies pressed into the memory of wood.
Dust rose like testimony.
The object pulsed once.
Every light failed simultaneously.
In darkness, the hum became architecture.

XV. TABLEAU: THE FIELD THAT MOVED CLOSER

She exited.
Or the outside entered.
The distinction had grown bureaucratically irrelevant.
The field from before was waiting with new patience. Grass inclined toward her steps as if rehearsed. The cow remained stationed at the edge of comprehension, chewing the continuity of existence into smaller, manageable truths.
This time the horizon advanced.
Not metaphorically.
Distance shortened with measurable insistence.

Mountains leaned forward. Clouds lowered their expectations. The sky adopted a provisional clarity.

She walked and arrived sooner than causality allowed.

The object grew lighter.

Or she grew heavier.

It was difficult to allocate responsibility.

When she reached the cow, she extended her hand. The animal regarded her with the same ancient audit it had conducted upon humanity since domestication began.

Then, without ceremony, it turned and began walking toward a point that was not yet visible.

She followed.

Behind them, the waiting room diminished in scale until it resembled a model constructed for instructional purposes.

The hum persisted.

Ahead, something vast prepared to malfunction.

CODA TO THE SECOND MOVEMENT

Systems had begun to notice themselves.

Objects had begun to choose.

Journeys had begun to resist metaphor.

And the machine — the patient, background, universe-sized machine — had not grown louder.
It had grown closer.

DEXTER SHOES
1974 - 2001
VEAZIE
FOOD PANTRY
TIBBETTS ORCHARDS
NO TRESPASSING
DEXTER SHOES
MADE IN MAINE 1958-2001

THE SOLE REMAINS

By Blake Chambless

I. LIFT HILL

[FORBIDDEN ENTRY SHADOW: Deep black silhouette of factory smokestack, dead center, bisecting frame]

The joke lives in his mouth like a stone worn smooth.

I'm an old heel but I have a good sole.

Harold Peavey, seventy-three, sits in the apartment on Main Street, Veazie, where the radiator clanks its own Morse code and the window holds a view of the Penobscot, gray as a bureaucrat's suit. The television—a thing of tubes and compromises—flickers its blue confession into the room.

[CIVIC TRACE: Faded Dexter Shoes employee ID, layered beneath frame, numbers half-visible: 1974-2001]

The documentary speaks of Scarabaeus sacer. Dung beetles. Rolling their balls of shit across the Kalahari, across the temple floors of ancient Egypt, across the television screen where Harold watches with the attention of a man who has touched ten thousand shoes and understood none of them.
The beetles navigate by the Milky Way, the narrator says.

Harold's hands remember leather. The way a sole curves. The smell of adhesive at 6 AM, fluorescent lights humming their industrial hymn. Twenty-seven years. Then the machines went to China and the machines took his friends and the machines left him here, in this room, with this joke:
I'm an old heel but I have a good sole.

II. THE GATEKEEPER

[GATEKEEPER OBJECT: Paper receipt, "VEAZIE FOOD PANTRY," stark white against black ground, timestamp bleeding]
He cannot find a dung beetle.

This becomes important. He has looked—in the yard behind the apartment complex, in the scrub woods along Route 2, in the drainage ditch where the shopping carts go to die. Maine does not accommodate. Maine offers winter and the memory of industry and the kind of silence that settles into a man's joints.

[WEATHER/ATMOSPHERE: Diagonal hatching—wind, cold, the particular gray of November in the Penobscot Valley]
Thursday. The thumb goes out on Route 2.

A Subaru stops. A woman with a "COEXIST" bumper sticker and an expression of calculated charity. Four miles to Bangor, to the kitchen on Hammond Street where the fluorescents hum the same hymn as the factory and the soup is thin and the bread is yesterday's bread and Harold Peavey eats with the gratitude of a man who has learned that dignity is a luxury item, nonessential, subject to availability.

[DISTORTION/STATIC: Scratched texture overlay—the sound of plastic trays, institutional echo]

He makes enough for two.

The Styrofoam containers stack. Soup. Bread. A square of cornbread that crumbles like promises. He carries them back to Veazie in the cold, thumb out again, the containers pressed against his chest like relics.

III. DROP

[PRIMARY ACTION SILHOUETTE: Two figures, doorway, one extending food, one receiving—gesture only, no features]

Marla Thibodeau does not answer doors so much as appear in them.

She is fifty-one. She is quiet. She is—the word the doctors use—schizophrenic, but Harold does not use this word because Harold does not have the authority to name what lives inside another person's head. He knows only that Marla makes things. That her apartment smells of flour paste and newspaper. That she hears what she hears and sees what she sees and this is none of his business.

"Brought dinner," Harold says.

"The beetles," Marla says. She does not look at him. She looks past him, at the space where the hallway meets the stairwell. "You were watching the beetles."

[DOUBLE EXPOSURE: Two versions of Harold, slightly offset—one in doorway, one already inside]

"How'd you know that?"

"The walls are thin," Marla says. But the walls are not that thin. Harold has lived here nine years. He knows what the walls permit.
She takes the Styrofoam. She opens it without ceremony. The soup steams its small domestic signal into the room, which is filled—filled—with papier-mâché forms. Orbs. Spheres. Balls of newspaper and paste, painted in browns and greens and the particular gray of something that has been through a digestive system.

"Dung," Marla says. "Elephant dung. They use it in paper. I read that. The fibers don't break down."

[VISUAL ECHO: Spherical forms repeated across frame—dung balls, planets, the curve of a shoe sole]

On her worktable: a helmet. Papier-mâché. Painted black, with mandibles extending from the forehead, curved and fierce. A beetle's head. A crown.

"For you," she says. "I made it for you. You're an old heel."

"But I have a good sole," Harold says.
Marla nods. This is the correct answer. This has always been the correct answer.

IV. LOOP

[FORBIDDEN ENTRY: Black rectangle—doorway of abandoned farmhouse, orchard behind, no entry visible]

The orchard has been dead for thirty years.
[CIVIC TRACE: Hand-painted sign, half-rotted: "TIBBETTS ORCHARDS — PRIVATE PROPERTY — NO"]

The rest of the sign is gone. Torn away. What remains is the "NO"—that fundamental syllable, that bureaucratic first principle. No entry. No trespass. No future in this particular configuration of land and trees and the American dream of agricultural self-sufficiency.

Harold wears the helmet.

He does not know why he wears the helmet. Marla put it on his head and he did not remove it. They walked here—two miles in the cold, through the woods behind the apartment complex, through the scrub where the old railroad spur rusts its slow confession into the earth. Marla carries three of her dung balls in a canvas bag.

"Offerings," she says. "For the beetles."

"There aren't any beetles," Harold says. "Wrong climate. Wrong latitude. I looked it up."

[WEATHER: Fog. Thick. The kind of fog that takes sides.]

"You looked it up," Marla repeats. She says it the way she says most things—flat, observational, as if language is a recording device and she is simply documenting.
The orchard opens before them. Dead apple trees in rows, their branches arthritic, their bark peeling in strips like old wallpaper. The fog moves between them. Something moves in the fog.

[DELAYED REVEAL: Shape in fog—circular, rolling, not fully resolved]

"Harold," Marla says.
"I see it."

"Do you see it?"

[COMPRESSION: Multiple exposures, same shape, different positions—trajectory implied]

It moves like a wheel. It moves like a thing that has learned to make itself into a wheel, that has solved the problem of locomotion through the radical act of becoming circular. It is perhaps three feet in diameter. It is perhaps a snake with its tail in its mouth. It

is perhaps the fog playing tricks on two people who have both, in their separate ways, been broken by systems larger than themselves.

The hoop snake is a legendary creature, the encyclopedia does not say, because Harold does not have access to an encyclopedia, because Harold has access only to a television with twelve channels and a neighbor who makes dung balls out of newspaper and a joke that lives in his mouth like a stone worn smooth.
[GATEKEEPER PHRASE, partially obscured: "DID WE—"]
"Did we imagine it?" Harold asks.
Marla places a dung ball on the ground. Ceremonial. Precise.
"Does it matter?" she says.

V. BRAKE RUN

[FINAL FRAME: Two silhouettes, standing, orchard rows receding into fog. Dung balls at their feet. Helmet on Harold's head—mandibles catching what little light remains.]

The thing in the fog is gone. Was perhaps never there. Will perhaps be there again, tomorrow, when Harold tells his joke to no one and Marla hears what she hears and the Penobscot River carries its gray indifference toward the sea.

Maine does not accommodate.
But Maine does not forbid, either. Maine permits the spaces between—the orchards that were and are not, the factories that employed and abandoned, the creatures that exist only in the testimony of those who are not, by institutional standards, reliable witnesses.
Harold removes the helmet. His head is cold. "I'm an old heel," he says.

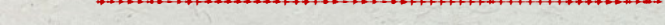
[ECHO RECURSION: Helmet shape repeated, fading, three iterations into fog]
Marla takes the helmet from his hands. She holds it like a sacred object. She holds it like a thing that has done its work.
"You have a good sole," she says. "That's not nothing."

They walk back through the fog, through the woods, through the system of paths and

roads and compromises that constitute a life in this particular place, at this particular time, when the beetles navigate by the Milky Way and the snakes roll like wheels and two people carry their small offerings into the space where belief and evidence have agreed, temporarily, to coexist.

[FINAL CIVIC TRACE: Faded, layered, almost illegible: "DEXTER SHOES — MADE IN MAINE — 1958-2001"]

The soup is cold when they get home. They eat it anyway.



[BLACK]

ACCESS
DENIED
NO ECOLOGICAL
COVERS ONLY
ACT NOT FOUND
AUTH 73126
EXIT
NO ECOLOGICAL
COVERS ONLY
COVERS ONLY
OUT
FIRE
HEALTH
OCCUPANCY

PERMIT RAIN, NO PREDATORS
By Josh Dalton

The bouncer's stamp hit Klean's knuckles—ink persistent, three-day jurisdiction, a temporary claim he hadn't asked for but kept anyway. COVERS ONLY faded on the thermal receipt like fog curating zero-point-one visibility. The receipt felt warm before he'd paid, as if it had been printed earlier for a different hand.

March gutters held snowmelt insisting on June thaw. The runoff carried a rumor of hatch—larvae implied before eggs, the arithmetic arriving ahead of cause. National Weather Service alerts buried under read receipts. Inside The Wave, PBR pitchers filled by slow accumulation. Klean stood near the rail, palms flat against condensation, revising the feeling of cold mid-touch, as if the

glass had been colder a moment ago or would be in a moment not yet here. A flannel regular muttered Sweet festering Fournier's it's cold as a morgue, motive plain: anthems, "Friends in Low Places," predictable sorrows pooled under the framed license renewing noise compliance, max 127 souls. The license looked older than the room and newer than the night.

Concertina slung, wheezing 1973 reeds. A zine sat heavy in Klean's coat, pressed against a DACF fact sheet last updated 2000—Pikonema alaskensis: heads red-yellow gray-green stripes, gregarious on new growth—printed fourteen times, laundromat lint canon, unread. The paper held a history it hadn't lived: Bath 1947, Washington County 1960s, carbaryl in the air before helicopters arrived.

Klean's want cracked consciousness like bellows before the squeeze. He tried to name it and got the wrong word, then the right word with the wrong weight.

House lights went red-jaundiced. The phrase comrades confront harbinger tried to form in his throat and failed, compressing into the stamp's dry itch:

Bath 1947 again again—
the first state contracts, planes low over spruce, white dust falling like applause that poisons—
1.5 million pounds by 1950, a ledger with no bottom edge—
birds, fish, honeybees itemized as loss—
no predators no records no records—
Bath 1947 contract renewal—
lime sulfur before that, hand-dropped from open cockpits,

a choreography of faith in powder—
then the long chemical sentence,
then the quiet where parasitoids fail to arrive—

The tin ceiling answered with its own weather. A coaster arced. Mic feedback needled the room, a high whine that said the same thing twice and meant it differently the second time. The band stalled on the edge of the chorus and wouldn't cross. Under the license, under the rules, under the COVERS ONLY, the crowd thickened nose-to-tail, flannel to flannel, a gregarious feed. Beer foam laced down plastic cups like frass rain, greenish, adhesive, killing small talk, coating boot leather. Someone laughed like a snapped twig. Someone else counted change as if it were acreage that might not belong to them yet.

Egg-mass logic. Stamp logic. Jurisdiction pressed to skin.
Chew chew—new needles—gone—duff—cocoon—rise—
you you you—

The zine warmed against Klean's thigh, as if remembering him from another reading. The fact sheet trembled with its own age. Gregarious feeders marching nose-to-tail, it read, clinical as a grocery list. 200 eggs per female, it read, the arithmetic of appetite that had already been tallied somewhere else. Klean thought of branch tips stripped inward, skeletons left standing—"flags," the foresters called them, red ghosts that persisted for years, signaling damage long after the crowd had gone home. He corrected the image mid-thought: not red, not always, sometimes a kind of honest gray that refused to dramatize.

At the bar, a woman in thrift velvet adjusted a safety pin, her eyeliner smudged into a quiet argument with gravity. Auto-brewery syndrome, she murmured to no one, fermenting in the dark. A booking slip, illegible, confirmed a genre that did not exist and had already been canceled. Duplicate void. The sound guy palmed the board like a pulse he didn't trust. Sliders up, sliders down. Delay. Reverb. A system asking the room to become its own echo and failing slightly each time.

No predators— the PA hissed, though no one had said it—
no predators—no—

The words sat wrong in the mouth of the room, too exact and not exact enough.

Klean’s hand itched under the stamp. Ink as egg mass. Three-day jurisdiction. The mark did not explain itself; it only persisted, shifting from time to permission to heat without warning. Around him, the crowd organized without instruction—clusters, lines, lanes of movement—gregarious, efficient, stripping the setlist to nubs, demanding the known chorus, the safe recurrence. Play it or go. The singer leaned in, and the mic answered with a wound that sounded like a rehearsal of itself.

A fragment dropped from the ceiling of thought and landed somewhere older than it should have:
Washington County, 1960s—
half a million acres like a ledger run out of ink—
helicopters writing carbaryl across air—
streams taking it downriver,

fern understories going slack—
Chew—chew— the hi-hat insisted.
You— the monitor insisted back, as if correcting a previous you.

Beer cascaded over the lip of a table. A dog snapped at chair legs like it recognized the pattern before the pattern existed. Pool cues became measuring sticks, then accusations. Near the back, a voice slurred something about swarms in the rafters, real as rent, and another answered, Ain't a documentary, man, as if that closed a door. It didn't. The door was a milk-crate gap. Through it, nothing entered; everything passed: dozens of yellow-green thoughts dropping to duff, spinning silk, waiting out weather with a patience that arrived early and late at once.

No indoors. No humans. The sheet had said that too, though it never says it aloud. Strict defoliators. They do not want the bar. They want the tips, the new growth, the first bright ignorance of a season that hasn't decided if it's begun.

Rain tapped the windows without clouds. Ink bled on a receipt no one was holding. Someone said permit rain like it was already filed.

Lights stuttered. OUT FIRE HEALTH OCCUPANCY! arrived as a block, a single word with many teeth. Phones bloomed in the fog. Beer died in cups mid-sentence. The band was cut at the gate—silence as a fader slammed. Language slipped a notch; sentences held but didn't carry.

Outside, the plaza reorganized into a map that worked. For a moment, the

path to the river was exact. Klean followed it and knew it contradicted the way he'd come. He took three steps and lost it.

A voice from nowhere and everywhere, correct in tone, wrong in timing: Proceed along the marked route. Avoid standing water. It helped a man with a limp find the curb. It bent the crowd into a line that led nowhere they agreed on.

Silhouettes smeared. Flaming Insomnia did you see? traveled a block, two, then forgot itself. A student filed a request and received a fossil: no records. Policy revised itself on a laminate somewhere: NO ECOLOGICAL COVERS ONLY. Booking error: ACT NOT FOUND.

Klean stood at the edge of water that was not visible and felt it invoice him.

The receipt in his pocket curled, heat-ghost letters lifting, fading, persisting exactly as long as they weren't looked at. He looked, and they thinned. He didn't, and they held.
Spruce stood at the edge of town, unmolested in public, flagged in private. No alerts this year, they said. Not here. Not now. The statement felt useful and wrong and kept someone calm.

The duff held time like a savings account with a bad name. Cocoons waited—two years, five—impervious to flood, to freeze, to the small corrections of predators that never arrived. Warm June winds would sign the release. Emergence is a chorus that does not practice. It simply arrives and has already been heard.
Rise— said the empty stage, though it was outside now.

You— said the hand with the stamp, though the ink had shifted to heat. Klean tried to remember if he came for anthems or for proof. The difference thinned under fluorescent mercy and failed to resolve. Around him, systems interlocked without introduction: license, ledger, larva, lyric. A crowd that feeds. A forest that records without paper. A soundboard that confesses in voltage and retracts it.

Responsibility invoiced itself in the absence of a clerk. Integration braided what it could: motifs aligning by accident, implying meaning, then slipping apart. Delay, reverb, distortion—economic grace off-balance, the room chasing its own tail of sound. The gate was cut, but the loop persisted. COVERS ONLY hummed where a name should be and wasn't.

Somewhere there was a key that had already been used.

Somewhere a padlock performed belief and called it procedure.

At the threshold, a bouncer-ledger tallied without numbers. Ink held. Skin remembered. The costume of being human fit until it didn't and then fit again differently. Neon negation flickered the word CLOSED into a suggestion that had been approved.

The system remained, awaiting entry, awaiting hatch, awaiting the next small, gregarious insistence that would strip what is tender and call it necessary.

BANGOR TO WASHINGTON
47.00
47
RESTRICTED ACCESS
4-7-2-9
SMITHSONIAN CLOSED
47 STEPS
PAGE 47
THIS ONE IS FOR THE BOY WHO LEARNS TO BE HELD

THE RECEIVING DISTANCE

By Drake Stoughton

SEQUENCE ONE: LIFT HILL

The bus ticket cost forty-seven dollars. He bought it online using his father's Visa, the one with the tape across the magnetic strip, the one that said HAROLD DUFRESNE in raised letters that had gone soft like old candy. The confirmation email arrived at 3:47 AM while his father snored through the second hour of a storage auction program, volume at forty-two, the television bolted to the wall so it wouldn't fall when Harold forgot where he was.

Marcus Dufresne, seventeen, had not left 414 Garland Street since March of 2020.

He needed to see the paintings. The ones that looked like they'd remember you back.
The girl in Pittsburgh—her username was ryder_waves—had sent him the link eight days ago. A YouTube video about Albert Pinkham Ryder. The New Bedford Whaling Museum exhibition. She'd written: these are soft. these are what soft looks like when it costs something.

He'd watched it eleven times. The Flying Dutchman appeared at minute 4:32. A ship made of atmosphere, emerging from or dissolving into a sea that didn't behave like water. The narrator said Ryder applied paint in layers over years, decades, until the surfaces cracked and heaved like something breathing underneath.
Marcus understood: the paintings were bodies that had forgotten how to stop becoming.

He printed the ticket on his father's printer, the one that still had paper from 2019. The paper was yellow now. Thermal damage. The ticket said BANGOR TO WASHINGTON DC / GREYHOUND / DEPARTURE 6:15 AM / ARRIVE 10:47 PM. Sixteen hours. He would need to bring his phone charger. He would need to bring his wallet, except he didn't have a wallet, so he would bring his father's wallet, which contained the Visa, an expired Sam's Club membership, and a photograph of his mother in a hospital gown, taken three hours before she died.

He had never seen her. He had been the reason she'd died. This was not a metaphor. The doctors had explained it to Harold, who had been sixty-nine then, who had married a woman forty-two years younger because loneliness was a condition that

worsened in maritime climates, and because Linda Fonseca had been kind to him at the VA when his hand wouldn't stop shaking.

Linda's uterus had ruptured during delivery. Amniotic fluid embolism. Marcus had been pulled from her body while the room filled with the sound of cardiac monitors flatlining.

Harold told this story once a year, on Marcus's birthday, after the third whiskey. Then he'd fall asleep, and Marcus would walk the stairs.

Three flights. Forty-seven steps. Each step was a plank in a ship that never arrived anywhere.

Tonight, he walked them until 5:30 AM. The podcast in his earbuds was about a man in Ohio who had collected every rejection letter he'd ever received and papered his bathroom with them. The man said:

eventually you stop noticing the no's. They become architecture.

Marcus noticed. He noticed everything. He noticed that his pajama pants—gray, elastic waist, purchased by Harold at Walmart in 2018—had developed a hole near the left knee. He noticed that the third stair from the top made a sound like a question. He noticed that the streetlights outside went amber at 4:00 AM, as if the municipality was trying to save money on something that couldn't be saved.

He took Harold's wallet from the kitchen counter at 5:45 AM.
Harold was still in the recliner. The television showed an advertisement for a medication that treated a condition Marcus had never heard of. The side effects included "thoughts of unusual calmness."

Marcus put on his coat—also purchased in 2018, also Walmart, also too short now—over his pajamas. He did not change. He did not shower. He had not showered in eleven days. He knew this because he kept a tally on his phone, in the Notes app, in a folder labeled EVIDENCE.
Evidence of what, he hadn't decided yet.

Outside, the snow was falling in the way snow falls in Bangor in February: with jurisdiction. The city plow had come through at 4:00 AM, but the sidewalks were the responsibility of property owners, and Harold had not touched a shovel since 2021. Marcus walked through eight inches of accumulation. His sneakers were canvas. They had been white once. Now they were the color of something that had given up.

The bus station was fourteen blocks away. He had looked it up on Google Maps. He had memorized the route because his phone might die and then what. The route involved two left turns and one right turn and a stretch of Congress Street where the buildings leaned toward each other like they were sharing a secret.
He walked.
A man outside the Dunkin' Donuts asked him if he was okay.

"I'm going to Washington," Marcus said.

"You're wearing pajamas," the man said.

"I know."

The man lit a cigarette. The smoke rose and was taken by the wind, and

the wind carried it toward the bus station, and Marcus followed.

SEQUENCE TWO: DROP

The Greyhound smelled like a body that had made decisions.

Marcus found seat 23B, window side, and pressed his forehead against the glass. The glass was cold. The cold was good. The cold was evidence that the world still had edges.

A woman across the aisle was eating a breakfast sandwich. The wrapper said EGG & CHEESE. The sound of her chewing was amplified by something Marcus couldn't name—maybe the acoustic properties of the bus, maybe the fact that he hadn't eaten in nineteen hours, maybe the way hunger turned everything into percussion.

The bus departed at 6:23 AM, eight minutes late. The delay was announced by the driver over a PA system that distorted his voice into something municipal: DEPARTURE DELAYED / WEATHER CONDITIONS / PLEASE REMAIN SEATED / YOUR PATIENCE IS APPRECIATED.
Marcus did not feel patient. He felt like a painting that was still wet.

He opened his phone. ryder_waves had sent him a message at 5:58 AM: are you doing it
He typed back: on the bus now
She responded immediately: you're actually insane. i love it. send pics.
He didn't know what she looked like. She had never sent a photo. Her profile picture was a detail from Ryder's Jonah—the prophet in the whale's shadow, the sea tilted at an angle that made no physical sense. She had told him she lived in

Pittsburgh, that she was nineteen, that she was studying something at Pitt but hadn't specified what. She had found his Reddit post about Ryder in a subreddit called r/HauntedByPaintings, which had 3,200 members, most of whom posted about religious iconography and crying.

Marcus had posted: Does anyone else feel like Ryder's oceans are made of time instead of water?

She had replied: yes. and time is the thing that drowns you even when you float.

That was six weeks ago. They had messaged every day since. She told him about the light in Pittsburgh, how it fell differently over the rivers, how the rivers were named Allegheny and Monongahela and Ohio, how the

names themselves sounded like they were grieving. He told her about the stairs, about Harold, about the way his mother existed only as a photograph and an absence and a medical term.

Ryder paintings in person.

She had said: the Smithsonian has three major ones. Jonah. Flying Dutchman. Pegasus Departing.

He had said: those aren't at the New Bedford exhibition?

She had said: no. those are the ones they couldn't move. too fragile. you'd have to go to DC.

He had said: that's far.

She had said: that's the point.

The bus stopped in Portland at 8:15 AM. A woman boarded and sat next to Marcus. She was holding a Styrofoam container that smelled like maple syrup. She looked at him for a long time.

"You okay, honey?"

"Yes."

"You're in your pajamas."

"I know."

"You smell a little... have you been sick?"

Marcus considered the question. He had not been sick. He had been inside. He had been walking stairs. He had been watching YouTube videos

about a painter who died in 1917, who lived in squalor in Manhattan, who let mice nest in his paintings because he refused to disturb their homes. Albert Pinkham Ryder had been a recluse. Albert Pinkham Ryder had understood that leaving required losing something you couldn't name.
"I'm going to see some paintings," Marcus said.

The woman nodded slowly, the way people nod when they have decided something is not their problem.

"Well," she said. "I hope they're worth the trip."

She opened her container. The pancakes inside were shaped like something that had tried to be circular and failed. She ate them with a plastic fork. Marcus watched. The

chewing was now duet instead of solo.

At 11:47 AM, the bus stopped at a Burger King in New Hampshire. Marcus had to use the bathroom. He had been holding it since Bangor because using public bathrooms required asking permission or understanding signage, and he wasn't sure he could do either.
The bathroom required a code.

A sign on the door said: RESTROOMS FOR CUSTOMERS ONLY / SEE CASHIER FOR ACCESS CODE.

Marcus stood in line. Four people ahead. The line moved slowly because one customer was disputing a charge—his Whopper had arrived without pickles, and the receipt said

EXTRA PICKLES, now a manager was involved.

Marcus waited.

His phone buzzed. ryder_waves: how's the ride

He typed: stuck in burger king. need bathroom code.

She responded: municipal poetry. get the code. pee. become free.
He reached the counter. The cashier, Trevor, seventeen, looked at him longer than necessary.

"You have to buy something."

"I'm not hungry."

"$3.29 for a small fry."

Marcus handed over the card. Trevor looked at the card: HAROLD DUFRESNE.

"Is this your card?"

"It's my father's."

"I need your father here to authorize the purchase."

"He's in Bangor."

"I can't run this card without the cardholder present."
Marcus felt something shift in his chest. Panic, tethered by bureaucracy. He needed the bathroom. The bus would leave in twelve minutes.
"4-7-2-9," Trevor said finally. "Don't tell anyone."

The bathroom was cold and smelled like industrial cleaner. Marcus stood at the urinal for a long time. The wall in front of him had graffiti: JASON WAS HERE / 2019 / BEFORE EVERYTHING.

Before everything. Marcus understood. He had a before too. March 2020. The last time he had walked outside for a purpose that wasn't survival. Everything was not going to be okay. But the song on the radio that morning had been catchy.

He washed his hands. The soap dispenser required pressing a button three times. Paper towel dispenser empty. He wiped his hands on his pajama pants, already stained.

He ran to the bus. Boarding had begun.

SEQUENCE THREE: LOOP

By Connecticut, Marcus had started to smell himself.

Not good. Eleven days without soap, plus nineteen hours on a bus, plus mustard, plus something metabolic—ketones maybe. The smell was human, ancient. The woman with the pancakes had moved. His seat assigned, 23B, full bus. No escape, just judgment.

His phone at 34%. He had forgotten his charger. Messages from ryder_waves:
you're getting closer
phone dying. might go dark
that's fine. you know where you're going
do I?
you're going to the museum. you're going to see the paintings. you're

going to stand in front of Jonah and you're going to understand something.

Marcus locked his phone. Outside, Connecticut was gray, flat, full of strip malls. A billboard: INJURED? CALL NOW. 1-800-555-HURT.

He did not feel injured. He felt pre-injured. The moment before the car accident, when steering was still theoretical.

At 4:47 PM, Port Authority Bus Terminal. One-hour layover. Gate 72. Monumental concrete, cathedral of transit. Saxophone somewhere in the distance. Longing had learned to breathe.

The DC bus boards in thirty-seven minutes. Phone at 22%. Hunger

gnaws. No cash. Harold's Visa fading, magnetic strip peeling. No alternative. The universe reduced to waiting and small numerical signs.

Security guard large, uniformed. Professional assessment without judgment.

"You okay, kid?"

"Yes."

"Waiting for a bus?"

"The DC bus. Gate 72."

"Gate 72, forty minutes."

"I know."
"Someone in DC?"

"Smithsonian. American art."

Guard nods slowly. "That closes at five-thirty."

"I know. Tomorrow, then."

"Where staying tonight?"

Marcus had not planned for tonight. "I'll figure it out."

"You got ID?"

"My father's in Bangor."

"Under eighteen. Guardianship. Protocol."

Marcus recites Harold's number. Phone goes to voicemail. Volunteer-sounding voice: leave a message or don't. He is alone. Decisions ripple.

SEQUENCE FOUR: BRAKE RUN

Smithsonian American Art Museum, 8th & G Streets NW. Seventeen-minute walk from bus station. Phone died at 11:23 PM, mid-message: you're almost th—.

Arrived 10:51 PM. Museum closed. Lobby glimpsed through glass, corner of a frame. Could be Ryder's.

Marble steps cold through pajama pants. Cold as language: you are here, you are not supposed to be here, both true.

Security guard muffled: "Museum's closed."

"I know. Opens at 11:30 tomorrow."

"Somewhere to stay?"

Shelter directions. Three turns, a church, blue awning. Mind memorizes.

Shelter "Second Chances." Institutional smell. Volunteer older woman. Questions about guardianship. CPS protocol explained. Marcus has no ID. Only ryder_waves, only the paintings. Promise projected through pixels and memory. Allowed to stay.

Cots aligned. Ceiling water-stained, shapes that might be ships, whales, figures drowning in seas that weren't water.

Jonah. The prophet falling. Whale rising. Sea tilted wrong. Forty-seven minutes. Rebecca leaves. Marcus alone. He is received.

SEQUENCE FIVE: LIFT HILL

Father calls. Harold distant, fragmented by age and dementia. Marcus explains journey. Harold

recalls Linda liked Ryder. Recognition in broken voice. Instructions for return via cash. Marcus absorbs logistics, quietude. Phone charged. ryder_waves messages received.

Museum opens at 11:30. Marcus arrives. Security: timed entry passes sold out. Curator Rebecca allows access after phone call. Journey validated.

Jonah. Fourteen by twelve inches. Small enough for backpack, irrelevant. Movement of canvas: falling, rising, sea tilted. Texture, layers of centuries; smell faintly of aged oil. Jonah's face: terror or relief indistinguishable. Numbers align: forty-seven dollars, forty-seven steps, forty-seven minutes. Recognition transfigures debt.

SEQUENCE SIX: BRAKE RUN

Bus to Bangor. Sixteen hours. Dreamless sleep. Arrival: 7:23 AM. Streets plowed, snow melting. Fourteen-block walk. Morning light. Buildings lean like old friends. Footprints first in fresh snow.

Home. Harold in recliner. Photograph of Linda. Conversation: soft paintings, butter-like. Marcus showered. Clothes from 2019, fit awkwardly. Air hot. Hot good. He descends stairs: three flights, forty-seven steps. Stairs practice, not escape.

Library books: eleven, overdue. Dusty backpack. Checkout free. American art history, section 759. Ryder book open: page 47. Margin note: This one is for the boy who learns to be held. Recognition reinforced.

Podcast: woman built sculpture from receipts. Eventually you stop counting. You start recognizing. Marcus recognizes: stairs are practice. Harold: grief and love processed in absence. Linda: existed, hoped son would be held. ryder_waves: promise kept. Paintings soft: terrifying, warm, kind.

TERMINAL SEQUENCE

Morning coffee. Barista observes clean, dressed, human-smelling Marcus. First sip, survival, then presence. Daylight, streets unplowed, no amber streetlights. Bus passes south. Thoughts of future travel, rivers grieving, Pittsburgh.

Painting in mind persists: Jonah falling, whale rising, sea tilted. Understanding: sea tilted toward. Prophet, whale, boy in pajamas.

Drowning: arriving. Proof of mother,
proof of soft, proof of being held.
He finishes coffee. Walks home.

Integration Anchor: Forty-seven recurs—steps, dollars, minutes, page number. Debt converted to recognition.

Gatekeeper Object: Wallet photograph of Linda → Harold → margin annotation → presence.
Weather Testimony: Snow preserves/erases footprints. Melting signals transition. Cold takes jurisdiction, then releases.

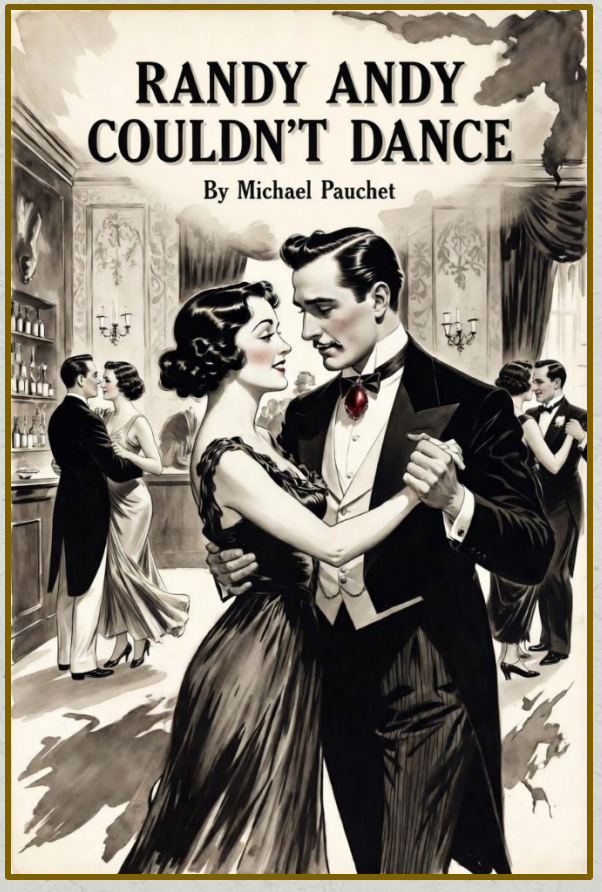
Enforcement Mechanism:

Documentation void (timed passes), interrupted by human intervention (guard's call). Protocol breached through recognition of need.
Forbidden Entry: Museum blocked materially → unlocked via narrative accumulation.

Civic Interactions: Burger King code negotiation, Port Authority security, shelter intake/CPS. Cosmic unlocked: ryder_waves as promise-keeper.
Acoustic Pedals: Delay (Harold's recognition), Reverb (stairs), Gate (ryder_waves' messages).
Checksum verified:
Clarity: motive stated plainly.
Responsibility: bus ticket via Harold.
Return: reckoning.
Integration: mother's poster → YouTube → pilgrimage → library margin note → recognition.

Final Meditation:

Marcus walks the stairs. He walks them not to escape. He walks them to arrive. To be held. To recognize. To be soft, in a world that finally bends toward him.


RANDY ANDY
COULDN'T DANCE
By Michael Pauchet

The countess was, in everyone's estimation, a beautiful woman. She was intelligent, refined, and elegant. Her fêtes were the envy of proper society—invitations were coveted by upper and middling sorts alike.

This led to much jockeying for her attention and favor. Just being invited bestowed upon the guest an aura of social ascent. They were, as the French would say, un arriviste. No one cared that her chateau had cracks in its foundations and paint scaling from its façade. If anything, her guests would have feigned that those flaws were de rigueur among the elite.

As happens in the most unexpected ways, a gentleman of less-than-stellar reputation received an invitation quite by accident. His surname and that of the intended

recipient varied by only a vowel, thus the confusion. A commoner by birth, he fancied himself an aristocrat. It was a momentous moment for him when he discovered the missent invitation.

On the night of the highly anticipated event, he dressed in his finest, sporting a gold brooch adorned with a large ruby on his lapel. Riding in his gilded carriage, he passed many a snide smile hidden behind the hands of onlookers. Arriving at the chateau, he noticed other carriages exhibiting faded varnish, their gilt cracked and peeling. A passing marquis, looking at the guest's own, remarked, "Things novel and chic smell of nouveau riche," and stalked off.

At the doors, the footmen's coattails were ragged, their cuffs frayed and worn. Inside, the usher's medals were

covered in a patina of verdigris, and his hearing seemed to be failing. Handed a flute of champagne, the guest read Dom Pérignon on the bottle, but his palate would have sworn it was Brut. When no one acknowledged him, he gravitated to a side of the ballroom and pretended to admire the faded silk wallpaper.

The countess, seizing an opportunity to metamorphose gaffe into serendipity, strolled over to the guest. Extending her hand, she allowed him to kiss her ring. In dated language, she asked, “Do you perchance, dance?”

Destiny, it seemed, had alighted on him in all its plumage. First, the invitation, now the attention of the lady herself. Surely his future was gold. With a delighted look, he led the countess to the dance floor. An

orchestra, hiding behind velvet curtains, stuck a needle in the groove of a Viennese waltz. Soon, the two were moving and swirling among other couples.

The countess appreciated his proficiency, but it was his technique she was interested in. Her spies had earlier informed the lady that this guest was well known for taking care of other people's problems. Especially those that required discretion. As the music ended, she asked him if he was enjoying the fete. Standing so close, for the first time, he noticed lines around the lady's eyes. The skin on her neck was beginning to sag. He might have termed her looks handsome if not for the hype. "Oh, most assuredly, your ladyship. It's an honor to be here."

“We’re delighted to hear that. Now tell me, is it true you can make distasteful things disappear?”

Startled by the sudden segue, the guest replied, “I have been known to lend a hand in these matters, yes.”
The countess smiled, and it was like the yawning maw of a hungry anaconda, her guest thought. “I have a problem which is causing me some distress.”

Overwhelmed by a sudden surge of chivalry, her guest avowed, “Any knave who would make you cry, my lady, I would deem it an honor to relieve you of their presence.”
Looking faintly amused, she said, “At this level, we don’t shed tears. Like real feelings, we rid ourselves of those long ago.”

Beginning to feel out of his depth, the guest asked, “What is it I can do for the countess?”

“My husband’s brother. You see him over there by the cocktail bar? We’ve begged him to do the honorable thing and commit suicide or at least emigrate, but the lout refuses.”
Surprised, the guest asked, “What is his crime?”
“Why, he can’t dance, of course. Not a foxtrot, not even a slow waltz. He simply must go.”

“Well, surely the Count can order his removal. It is his chateau.”

“As long as he does what we wish, yes, we let him think he’s in control.”
Beginning to discern where power in this place really lay, the guest opined to himself that anyone she considered a menace to her serenity

was swimming in dangerous waters. Still, he feared the blowback such a sensitive task might generate among her other guests.

“Oh, I’m not worried about you, dear—you’re a predator.”

“Still, I would enjoy keeping my head.” The chopping block in the front yard had not escaped his attention upon arriving.

The countess assured him that he would operate under her aegis.
“It’s distasteful, but those rumbustious shufflers occasionally demand a sacrifice,” she said, disdain written across her features.

“So, Caesar, his wife, and children then were all victims of public opinion?”

“Of course.” She looked at her guest with reptilian eyes. “We exist only as long as we’re relevant, and sometimes that means cutting out those spares who stand in the way of the narrative.” Turning, the Countess melded into the crowd.

The orchestra struck up a slow waltz. Left to his thoughts, the guest sipped faux champagne and wondered how long a person’s novelty lasted at the chateau.

He didn’t see the countess again, and the other guests continued to ignore his presence. When the evening ended, he collected his coat and top hat from an elderly lady in the cloakroom.
Walking to his carriage, he paused and, turning, looked back. There seemed to be an eldritch air about the chateau and its occupants. On his

ride home, through his carriage windows, this time he saw the sneers on people's faces—heard their scornful sniggers. *So, this is life at the chateau,* he reflected.

STOP
PAID
RECORD
12:42
OVERDUE NOTICE

Tree Streets:
Ledger of the Midnight Trolley
By Hamilton X

The trolley arrived in the night like a pulse running under the skin of the Tree Streets, battery humming, headlights slicing the fog into ledgered slices of light and shadow that trembled as if aware of themselves. One-Lane Leroy pedaled with the precision of a man who had cataloged every house, every curb, every invisible mark left by decades of ghost trolleys. Elm, Birch, Forest, Maple—streets that had absorbed footsteps, trolley tracks, whispered local legend—breathed around him, alive in muted register.

From his yacht-perched tree fort on Elm, Freddy Bubbles observed. The yacht had been dragged from the harbor and lashed into the crotch of a sturdy elm, a floating home, therapy office, and observational post. Wind chimes clinked against ropes, producing irregular rhythms that seemed to harmonize with Leroy's trolley hum. Freddy leaned over the railing, clipboard in one hand, steaming mug in the other. "Careful

with the brakes, Leroy," he called. "Displacement without vector is therapeutic but hazardous."

Leroy slowed, calibrated instinct and machine. Momentum fed momentum; the trolley swayed slightly, scraping a low-hanging elm branch. Leaves fluttered like currency from a mismanaged ledger. Somewhere, a cat traced a looping path across the street, vanished into the shadows. Birch Street held its sentinel. Miriam, Neighborhood Watch Queen, wife of Zinemeister One Size, cataloged everything. Blinds pulled just enough to frame her watch, notebook open, pen poised. Leroy approached the phantom stop sign perched on the curb. She ticked it in her ledger: Elm Street, 12:03 AM, trolley, wheel off track, leaves clipped—sequence unbroken, debt unrecorded.

Freddy decided the night required a test. Cushions from therapy sessions fell from the yacht-fort in a controlled drop, landing squarely in Leroy's path. Leroy swerved with subtle perfection, trolley leaning, headlights glancing off polished wood and swinging

ropes. Rhythm preceded reason, style replaced agency, motion was motion without vector. Shadows danced; streets calculated. At 12:42 AM, the trolley reached Maple Street. Faint traces of century-old tracks, invisible under modern asphalt, guided him. Leroy paused at the phantom stop sign again, tapped it with a wooden mallet strapped to his belt. Validation complete. The elms groaned; wind plucked Freddy's chimes into delicate chaos; the world waited, breathing, recording.

A weather interrupt arrived: fog, dense, unbidden, perfectly timed. Headlights diffused, momentum corrected momentum, arrival conditions null upon approach. Leroy passed Miriam's Birch Street outpost; she ticked another mark. Observation complete. The ledger consumed her; she became sequence, motif, motif reinforcement.

Freddy muttered fragments of therapy scripts aloud, ropes swinging, chimes rattling, all recorded by the invisible register of the streets. Leroy passed beneath them, lightly clipping a rope. Consequence registered, minor liability accrued.

Somewhere, a squirrel fled; leaves fluttered down, sequence deferred but noted.

By 1:15 AM, Leroy approached Forest Street. He swerved to avoid low-hanging branches in compliance with tree ordinances, momentum feeding momentum, streets breathing, shadows shifting. The phantom stop sign had moved again, now angled impossibly toward the north, as if the streets themselves had repositioned it. Sequence acknowledged; debt registered invisibly.

Dawn approached. Battery warm, trolley parked beneath the largest elm. The phantom stop sign vanished, returning to its nocturnal wanderings. Freddy Bubbles' yacht-fort resonated with the last vibrations of night; chimes and ropes hung limp. Miriam receded, blinds closed silently, ledger complete for the moment but already aware of future anomalies.

One-Lane Leroy dismounted. Momentum still pulsing in his legs, sequence already repeating, the streets carrying residual hums, shadows, and leaves into the waking day. Elm, Birch, Maple, Forest exhaled; the

audit-core of the Tree Streets had registered another night, layered, unbalanced, absurdly perfect. Leroy retreated to the garage, trolley cooling, ready for re-entry.

Night 2: Escalation
The trolley hummed awake before midnight, headlights cutting faint arcs through fog that had already begun to accumulate along the Tree Streets. Leroy mounted. Streets registered his approach as if anticipating him. Elm, Birch, Maple, Forest—streets remembered him, recorded him, shifted subtly to accommodate motion without vector.

Freddy Bubbles, ensconced in his yacht-tree fort, had prepared additional interventions: mirrors reflecting trolley light, ropes weighted with sandbags, chimes recalibrated for air density. “Tonight,” he muttered, “we test the displacement of consciousness.” Cushions were strategically placed along the trolley’s path, controlled chaos as therapy and experiment.

Miriam tightened her ledger. Notes from Night 1 had been indexed, cross-referenced,

filed in her mind with obsessive precision. Tonight, she was not passive. Any anomaly, any rogue leaf, shadow, or trolley wobble would be cataloged, enforced, reconciled against her internal audit.

The phantom stop sign appeared again, perched at an improbable angle on Forest and Maple. Leroy slowed, tapped it. Momentum fed momentum; trolley swayed gently, headlights scanning branches and the yacht-fort's ropes. Beneath the pavement, traces of old trolley tracks pulsed faintly, responding to invisible memory.

At 12:18 AM, a sudden gust—a weather interrupt—blew through Elm Street. Chimes exploded into discordant resonance; the trolley tilted. Leroy adjusted instinctively. Momentum corrected momentum; leaves fluttered in arcs; a small squirrel fled, logged as minor liability.

Freddy activated a pulley mechanism: weighted cushions swung across the street. Leroy dodged, trolley leaning precisely, motion feeding motion. Mirrors fractured the light into a chaotic kaleidoscope; rhythm

persisted beyond reason, style accrued liability, displacement remained without vector.

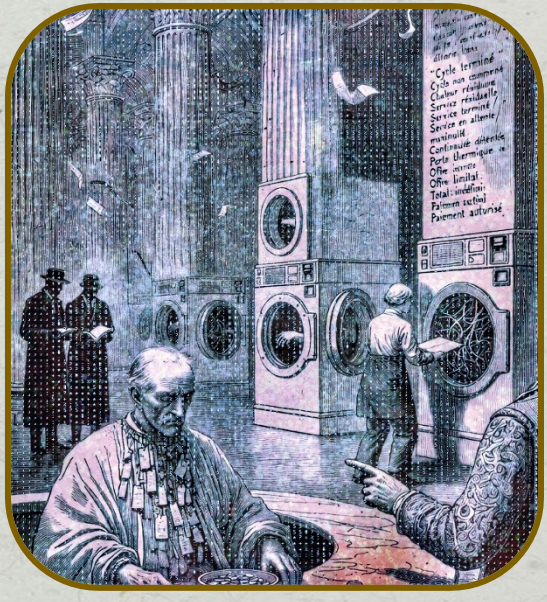
Miriam noted anomalies: leaf clipped, cushion dodged, trolley swayed, phantom stop sign shifted. Her ledger now included a cross-temporal matrix: Night 1 sequences linked to emergent Night 2 patterns. She subtly intervened: porch light flicked, curtain shifted, shadows coaxed.

By 12:57 AM, the trolley reached Maple. Streets pulsed faintly with traces of century-old rails. The trolley, responding almost autonomously, slowed, aware of its ledger obligations. Leroy tapped the phantom stop sign twice. Momentum fed momentum; action preceded justification; rhythm persisted.

Freddy spoke therapy scripts into the wind, ropes swinging, chimes rattling. Leroy's trolley swerved subtly, a ledgered dance with the neighborhood. Creeks, plinks, sways—every residual motion an entry: unbooked, unbalanced, yet accounted for.

Approaching Forest Street, the trolley encountered near-impenetrable branches. It hesitated, almost sentient. Momentum fed momentum; the trolley threaded between limbs and shadows, clipping leaves only when unavoidable. Phantom stop sign repositioned itself, now pointing north. Sequence acknowledged; debt registered invisibly.

Dawn approached. Battery warm, trolley parked under the largest elm. Phantom stop sign vanished, returning to nocturnal wanderings. Freddy Bubbles' yacht-fort resonated faintly. Miriam receded, blinds closed, ledger complete but aware of future anomalies.
One-Lane Leroy dismounted. Streets exhaled; residual hums, shadows, leaves carried into day. Sequence repeated, oscillating. The Tree Streets audit-core remained active: rhythm before reason, displacement without vector, role as consuming contract, deferred collapse, unpayable debt. The night was recorded, layered, absurdly perfect, already repeating.


Cycle terminé
Cycle non commencé
Chaleur résiduelle
Service terminé
Service en attente
Continuité obtenue
Porte thermique
Offre limitée
Total indéfini
Paiement autorisé

FABRIC DIVISION:
"Permanent Press Incident"
By Minnie Spilkoman

There are two types of people in this world.

Those who remove their laundry… and those who leave it in too long.

The difference isn't time.

It's character.

Cycle complete.

The machine hadn't started yet.

The call came in before it was placed. That happens in this line of work. You learn not to argue with it.

They said there was heat where there shouldn't be heat. Said it lingered. Said something sat too long and didn't want to admit it.

I took it down in my notebook under Soft Evidence. The paper already knew what I was writing.

Outside, the night had that quiet suburban look—lawns squared off like they were trying to behave. Inside, the laundromat hummed like a confession that didn't want to be heard.
Today's musical background was brought to you by Steppe Circuit. Mongolian techno drum & bass outfit. New EP out through Sony Music Entertainment. The numbers were good. Too good. The kind of good that shows up before it earns it.

The music started before the speakers warmed up.

There were four machines running.

Five loads registered.

There were only two of us.

My partner stood by a front-loader, looking at it like it owed him money.

I went to the dryer bank. One door hung open an inch. Not enough to notice. Just enough to matter.

"Cycle ended," I said.

He didn't look at me. "It sat."

"By how long?"

He checked his watch. It hadn't started ticking yet.

"Long enough to wrinkle," he said.

I reached in and pulled out a shirt. Damp. Warm in a way that felt deliberate. Cotton blend. The label blurred when I tried to focus on it.

"This one knows," I said.

"They all know," he said.
"No," I said. "This one's decided."
Behind us, a dryer door creaked open.

Neither of us touched it.

A third hand shut it.

I didn't turn around. You learn not to look at everything.

"We've got post-cycle heat," I said.

"Order confirmed," said something above us.

My partner glanced at the ceiling. "No order was placed."

There was no item attached to it. There never is.

I pulled the shirt out again.

Removal complete.

It stayed where it was.

For a second I saw myself reflected in the glass—same stance, same coat, same patience worn thin in the same places. The reflection held. I didn't.

We took a walk around the perimeter. You don't question a room head-on. You let it tell you where it leaks.

The change machine sat against the far wall, humming like it had a side business. It blinked once, twice, like it was trying to remember what it was. Out of order.

Exact change only.

Both messages lit at the same time.

Outside, a van idled under a flickering light. White once, now the color of long use. Letters ghosted along the side where something official had been peeled away and not replaced.

The vendor stood by the open door. Clipboard. Jacket zipped up wrong. Eyes that counted before they saw.

"You called it in?" I said.

"I didn't call anything," she said. "I get dispatched."

"From who?"

She looked past me, like the answer was parked across the street.

"Same place you do."

She stepped inside without asking.

The machine registered her before she reached it.

"You got complaints?" my partner said.

"I got volume," she said. "Quarters go in.

Something else comes out."

"What else?"

She shrugged. "Depends who's looking."

The machine clicked.
She opened the panel. Wires nested in there like they'd grown together.

"People think it's the coins," she said. "It's not the coins."

"What is it?" I said.

She tapped the metal housing.

"It's the agreement."

Terms apply.

She handed me a coin.

Or I handed it to her.

Or it had always been in my palm.

It felt warm.

"You seen wrinkling?" my partner said.

"I see delay," she said. "Wrinkles are just what delay looks like when it settles."

"Anyone else come in?" I said.

She nodded toward the back.

"She's been here longer than the machines."

The older woman was mopping in slow, even strokes. No hurry. No wasted motion. The kind of work that doesn't expect to finish.

The floor behind her looked the same as the floor ahead.

She wore a sweater that had kept its shape out of habit. One sleeve sagged a little near the wrist. Something tucked inside, pushing the fabric out—a balled-up tissue, tight and deliberate, like it had a purpose beyond its size.

I watched it as she moved. It didn't shift. It held.

Foreign object detected.

"Ma'am," I said.

She didn't look up. "You boys tracking something?"

"We're tracking heat," my partner said.

"Heat's easy," she said. "It rises. Then it stays where it shouldn't."

She pushed the mop forward.

The water spread.

The shine didn't.

"You see anyone leave a load?" I said.

She dipped the mop again. Same motion. Same water.

"People leave all the time," she said. "It's the staying that's unusual."

"What's in the sleeve?" my partner said.

She stopped just long enough to consider the question.

"Contingency," she said.

"For what?"

"For when it doesn't add up."
She squeezed the mop.

Water fell.

Or didn't.

The floor showed it anyway.

"You ever use the machine?" I said.

She smiled without changing anything else.

"I don't break change," she said. "I keep it."

Behind us, the vendor closed the panel.

She met my eyes.

"You're late," she said.

"We're on time," I said.

She shook her head.

"No," she said. "You've already been here."

We went back upstairs. The office overlooked the floor like a bridge on a ship.

He sat the same way we left him. The room held its breath around him.

The face was still tight, still coiled. The cigar had burned down without shortening. The ash held like it had a reason.

"You think this is laundry," he said.

"Limited time offer," said the radio.

"That's your first mistake," he said.

He slid the folder again.

PERMANENT PRESS INCIDENT.

Case opened: 14:02.
Case opened: not yet.

"We spoke to the vendor," I said.

"Certified unit," he said, like that settled it.

"And the woman on the floor," my partner said.

"Maintenance," he said. "Always ahead of the mess."

A drop gathered at the edge of the cigar ash. Hung there.

It never fell.

The stain showed up anyway.

"You let it wrinkle," came the voice from the doorway.

Or the hallway.

Or the pipe.

Same words. Same weight.

"It was within acceptable-"

"Don't sell me acceptable."

Back downstairs, everything had resumed.
Or never stopped.

The man by the dryer turned toward us.

"I think this is mine," he said.

"No one owns this," I said.

Hands went in again. Same motion. Different bodies.
"You feel that?" my partner said.

"Stay on the case," I said.

"I'm inside the case," he said.

The shirt held every state at once.
Wrinkled.

Not wrinkled.

Already folded.

Never washed.

Final state: permanent.

We closed it out the way we always do. On paper.

Or on file.

Or on whatever keeps score when no one's looking.

In this world, you don't control the cycle.

You just pay for it.

Total: $0.00.

Total: $47.13.

Total: undefined.

I checked my pocket on the way out.

The coin was still there.

Or had just arrived.

Or had already been spent.

It felt warm.

From the back, the mop moved.

From the van, the engine idled.
From upstairs, the ash held.

And through it all, like it had been there first and would be there last:
"Three types."

I waited for the rest.

Nothing followed.

Unregistered category detected.

Pricing pending.

I wrote it up the way it happened.

Or the way it was billed.

Same difference in this line of work.

Ledger
By Jinx

The booth casts him before he sits, a pre-cut silhouette, elbows already placed, the Turkish book—İrade Terbiyesi—laid down like a permit, like a badge that reads without reading, and the room—fluorescent, civic, a place where gravy has a municipal patience—accepts the placement as if a form has been stamped somewhere unseen, ☒, and Anne arrives with the pot, steam lifting in a thin white script that says nothing and everything, “Coffee??” she says, and he answers with the book, not the cup, “Will,” he says, “education of it,” and the words land before their cause, like subtitles for a film that has not begun, →, and she pours, watching the meniscus rise, watching the little tremor of the surface that is always about to spill and never does, “We’re doing something like that,” she says, “but different,” and he smiles, the smile of a correction already priced, “You’ve been taught to excuse yourselves with mechanisms,” and she says, “We’ve been taught that stress reroutes the system,” and he says, “System,” tasting the word as if it

were foreign, and the register flickers, a split screen, his voice on one channel, hers on another, “Discipline,” he says, “is not a feeling,” “Control isn’t a constant,” she says, “it’s a capacity,” and the receipt printer coughs, a dry staccato, as if to interrupt, as if to annotate, ≠, and the book’s margins—if one were to look—would be a forest of underlines, of exclamation points, of arrows that point to themselves, “You are very intelligent,” he says, placing the bills under the check with a geometry that is less generosity than signature, and she says, “Thanks,” the word landing flat, a board laid across a gap, and the room absorbs the exchange, stores it as heat, as grease, as a small unfiled error, ∴, and outside the night is a different ledger, the lot a grid, the lights a series of indifferent suns, and he is already there, leaning, waiting, as if the scene had been spliced in ahead of time, “We weren’t finished,” he says, and she says, “We are,” moving past, the bag a hinge, the keys a small bright argument, and he steps into her path, “Respect,” he says, the word suddenly heavy, suddenly the only word that matters, “is not optional,” and she says, “Neither is no,” and the moment fractures, a montage of

hands and angles and breath, ✶, his hand finding her arm with the wrong grammar, a grip that thinks it is instruction, “You need to learn—” he says, and she says nothing, because there are moments when language would only slow the exit, and the spray is already in her hand, already a decision that precedes its reason, a thin red arc that cuts the air and his face at once, and he recoils, the scene stuttering, frames dropping, his voice breaking into a series of disowned syllables, “—spect—sp—” and she is running, the asphalt unrolling beneath her like film, each step a splice, each breath a jump cut, ///, and the car receives her without comment, the door a hard consonant, the engine a vowel that holds, and the drive is a blur of repetitions, left-right, red-green, the body rehearsing departure long after departure has been achieved, and inside the dorm the one who opens the door does not ask for narrative but for presence, “Sit,” she says, and Anne sits, and the phone becomes a bridge, a number dialed that leads not to explanation but to routing, to a voice that says, “We’re here,” and then to another, “An officer is on the way,” and Anne says, “A woman, please,” and the request is not a

preference but a calibration, a setting of terms, ≈, and when the officer arrives she listens, and listening is a structure here, a scaffolding that holds the words without bending them into something else, “You did what you needed to do,” she says, and the sentence is not praise but alignment, and then the other call enters, a voice over, an intrusion that insists on being part of the sequence, “We have a collision,” the dispatcher says, “driver deceased,” and the description matches in the way that coincidences match, not as answers but as overlaps, and the room holds two tracks at once, the attempted violence and the sudden absence of its agent, and Anne feels the split as a physical thing, relief and anger and something like grief occupying the same space without negotiating, ⊕, “I don’t know what I feel,” she says, and the officer says, “You don’t have to know right now,” and the sentence opens a small corridor through which time can pass without being measured, and later, in the clinic, the language changes again, becomes precise, becomes clinical, “There has been a miscarriage,” they say, and the word lands with a weight that no montage can soften, no

cut can elide, because it names a subtraction that is not metaphor, not symbol, but fact, a future that had begun to write itself in her body and is now unwritten, ☒, and she nods, because nodding is sometimes the only available grammar, and the room remains the same size while everything in it alters, the chair, the paper on the table, the small metal instruments that do not speak but record, and afterward she sits on the edge of her bed with the textbook open, the diagrams of brain regions clean and labeled, the arrows tidy, the claims careful, “Prefrontal cortex,” the page says, “modulates impulse,” and she traces the line with her finger as if it were a road she could take back to the moment and choose differently, and she knows this is not how it works, that knowledge does not retroactively authorize action, that explanation does not refund experience, ∴, and yet she does not discard the book, does not discard the other one either, the Turkish text that had been used as a prop, because between them there is a field, a space in which she can move, not to reconcile them but to refuse the demand that one cancel the other, and she decides—not as a declaration but as a practice—that she will use the

systems that exist to report, to be heard, to be accompanied through what follows, and that she will also keep for herself the part that resists filing, that resists being priced or measured, the part that says, quietly and without spectacle, that she is not a role to be fulfilled, not a line item to be closed, not a figure to be corrected, —, and if the story insists on a final image it is not of resolution but of persistence, of a light that does not claim to master the dark but continues anyway, cutting through it in narrow beams that shift and flicker and, in their very instability, tell the truth about what they can and cannot do.

The Bibliographic Perimeter

Cluster 01: The Kinetic Stasis Node

1. Anchor Text (The Serious Foundation)

Tucker, Abigail. *The Lion in the Living Room: How House Cats Tamed Us and Took Over the World.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016.

Role: Establishes the core idea of "Subversive Domination"—how a small, ostensibly useless entity exerts total control over a larger system through emotional hacking.

2. Wildcard (The Reframing)

Beyrouthy, B., M. F. Schatz, and J. L. Sammons. "The Physics of Slinky: The Role of Tension and Geometry in Spontaneous Motion." *Physical Review Letters* 91, no. 12 (September 2003): 124301.

Role: Reframes "action" as a purely mathematical inevitability. It suggests that even the most "quirky" movements are governed by rigid, hidden laws of tension.

3. Friction Source (The Contradiction)

Fabricator: Saunders Midwest, LLC., Meridian, MS
Assembled Desk Only/Unassembled Disabilities
If globally shipped, no prohibited

The "Pet Rock" (Original 1975 Model). 1975. Created by Gary Dahl. Mixed Media (Rock, Cardboard, Straw). Accession Number: 2001.0016.01. The Strong National Museum of Play, Rochester, NY.
Role: Challenges the previous two. If cats dominate through biology and Slinkys through physics, the Pet Rock dominates through *pure void*. It is an object that does nothing, yet commanded an entire economy of attention.

The Synthesis (The Voice)
"Taken together, these suggest that agency is an illusion maintained by the observer; whether through biological hacking, gravitational tension, or the marketing of a literal void, we are constantly being governed by entities that refuse to move on our terms."

Matrix Metadata

- Tags: #Inertia #SyntheticAuthority #HiddenOrdinance
- Energy Types: Absurd (The Rock), Gravitas (The Physics), Signal (The Cats)
- Texture: Gritty, hum-driven, municipal-vague.

Cross-Cluster Connections (The Tree Streets Network)

- Link to "Midnight Trolley" Cluster: The Slinky's "momentum without vector" mirrors One-Lane Leroy's trolley movements-action that persists because the math demands it, not because it has a destination.
- Link to "Ledger" Cluster: The Pet Rock is the ultimate "unbooked debt." It is a placeholder in a ledger that provides zero value but requires a "manual" to explain its existence.
- Link to "Permanent Press" Cluster: The "Lion in the

Living Room" mirrors the Laundromat Vendor—an entity that has "already been here" and has already established the terms of your stay before you walked in.